

JAN FRANS VAN BLOEMEN, CALLED ORIZZONTE

(Antwerp 1662 - Rome 1749)

The Flight into Egypt



The Rest on the Flight to Egypt

oil on copper, a pair
26.7 x 43.8 cm (10½ x 17½ in) each

Provenance: Henry Hucks Gibbs, 1st Baron Aldenham, by 1887;
thence by descent to the previous Private Collector.

'Beautiful pictures done in such beautiful sites, with verdant foliage, limpid silver water, and with an agreeableness of colour; accompanied by small figures of the utmost gracefulness, with rural dwellings and urns: all so well assembled, that his pictures were welcomed into all the galleries of Italy'

-Nicola Pio, on the landscapes of Jan Frans van Bloeman¹

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT DEPICTS THE HOLY FAMILY making their way through an idealised classical landscape. Joseph leads his donkey, which bears mother and child, along a path which winds its way into the distance before disappearing behind a grove of trees. Beyond this, the painting opens up to a dramatic, undulating mountainous background, with a fortified town perched atop one of the peaks. On the left-hand side, a stream flows gently along and it is flanked, on the far bank, by a rocky wall. Acting as a *repoussoir*, we are drawn by the stream into the background, with the meticulously depicted tree on the right-hand side serving as a framing device.

In the accompanying picture, *The Rest on the Flight to Egypt*, Jan Frans van Bloemen, called Orizzonte, has painted a similar, Arcadian landscape. However, the most significant difference is the inclusion, on the left-hand side, of ancient artefacts, which help to contextualise the scene. The large stone urn on a plinth reinforces the sense of antiquity, with which both paintings are imbued; however the sphinx and the triangular structure behind it, the shape of which echoes the pyramids, specifically place this scene in ancient Egypt. This corner of the painting recalls the *capricci* of artists such as Giovanni Paolo Pannini (1691-1765), which were so popular with fashionable Roman society in this period. Again Orizzonte has used a precisely constructed composition that leads the eye from foreground figures through the landscape to a town set against a mountainous background.

The carefully constructed compositions evident in the present works are very much a feature of Orizzonte's work, a further example, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, being his *Landscape with the Communion of Saint Mary of Egypt* (fig. 1). In this painting the diagonal line of the river guides our focus from the foreground figures, through the relatively lush Italianate landscape to the imposing background. The river is particularly reminiscent of that in *The Rest on the Flight to Egypt*, with Orizzonte delighting in displaying his skill in depicting the play of the bright Italian sunshine on the water's surface. In both *The Flight into Egypt* and *Landscape with the Communion of Saint Mary of Egypt* the prominent positioning of an overhanging tree serves, not only as a framing



Jan Frans van Bloemen, called Orizzonte, *Landscape with the Communion of Saint Mary of Egypt*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Figure 1)

device, but also as a chance for Orizzonte to carefully record natural features. His scrupulous observation is especially evident in *The Flight into Egypt*, where the orange tinge of some of the leaves serve as the earliest signs of the coming autumn.

Orizzonte predominantly painted similar classical landscapes throughout his career, taking his inspiration from the Roman *campagna*. His landscapes, with their recession through a series of planes, soft, warm lighting and classical and religious subject matter, draw on the examples of artists such as Claude Lorrain (?1604/5-1682) and Gaspard Dughet (1613-1675). Orizzonte gained his moniker, meaning horizon, due to the wide panoramas found in his work. His paintings are exquisitely imbued with 'that difficult-to-define pastoral ambience' which helped to make him such a great painter in the eyes of his contemporaries.²

¹ Nicola Pio, *Le Vite di Pittori Scultori et Architetti* (1724), cited in E. Bowron and J. Rishel, *Art in Rome in the Eighteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 2000, p. 333).

² Vernon Hyde Minor, *The Death of the Baroque and the Rhetoric of Good Taste*, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 69.

